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ABSTRACT

Suggesting that too many educators and parents believe the myth of declining student literacy, this fastback puts student literacy in focus by examining trends in reading achievement from 1840 to the 1990s. The fastback discusses "then-and-now" studies, test restandardization studies, and the National Assessment of Educational Progress, concluding that unqualified statements that proclaim a decline in literacy are wrong. The fastback also examines some of the instructional issues obscured by "quick-fix" remedies implemented in response to the perceived decline in achievement--the need for (1) more reading instruction for all students; (2) more difficult texts, especially for average and better readers; (3) more critical analysis and synthesis of information from multiple texts; and (4) more emphasis on meaningful vocabulary throughout the grades. (RS)

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Student Literacy: Myths and Realities

Michael W. Kibby

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Student Literacy: Myths and Realities

by
Michael W. Kibby

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Introduction

Everybody knows that today's students do not read as well as students did in the "good ol' days," right? That criticism has become a regular feature in the litany of failure attributed to American education. But in truth, today's students are better readers than any previous generation of students.

The supposed decline in student literacy is perpetuated at the expense of today's young learners — often by their own teachers and parents. Moreover, the erroneous belief in this decline not only has pushed educators into "quick-fix" remedies that do not work but, more important, has obscured important issues in reading instruction.

The first purpose of this fastback is to put student literacy in focus by looking carefully at the trends in reading achievement from 1840 to today. Readers may find their misconceptions and assumptions challenged and, in many cases, shattered.

The second purpose of this fastback is to examine some of those previously obscured instructional issues. The absence of a decline in reading does not warrant complacency. These same data also point to critical instructional needs. Four such needs include: 1) more reading instruction for all students; 2) more difficult texts, especially for average and better readers; 3) more critical analysis and synthesis of information from multiple texts; and 4) more emphasis on meaningful vocabulary throughout the grades.

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The Myth of Declining Literacy

About 60 years ago, Will Rogers quipped that "schools aren't as good as they used to be — but then, they never were." That commentary aptly describes the thinking that underpins the myth of declining student literacy. Consider the following results from the PDK/Gallup Polls of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools. Over the past quarter-century, respondents have fairly consistently given their own local schools high marks while, simultaneously, giving low marks to schools in general. The prevailing attitude seems to be "my schools are okay, but the rest are not."

A likely source of the myth of declining student literacy is the continual stream of distorted media reports. The media pander to the public's seemingly insatiable thirst for bad news, and education is as good (or bad) a topic as any other. Today's public seems to expect the worst from schools, and the media do not disappoint. Misunderstandings about the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), as much as any misconceptions perpetuated by the media, reinforce erroneous beliefs about student literacy. Thus it may be helpful to look at this test's legitimate purposes.

The SAT is published for the College Entrance Examination Board (CEEB) by Educational Testing Service (ETS) of Princeton, New Jersey. From 1941 until its spring 1994 revision, the test consisted of two sections, verbal and mathematical. Each section was designed to measure knowledge and reasoning. The verbal portion was made up of 85 vocabulary and reading comprehension items, while the 60 items on

the math section measured mathematical problem solving in arithmetic, algebra, and geometry. For each section, scores ranged from 200 to 800. Used in conjunction with grades and other information, scores from the SAT have only one legitimate purpose: to assist colleges in making admissions decisions about individual students — one student at a time.

The SAT cannot be used to assess national achievement; it was not designed for this purpose, and students who voluntarily take the test are not representative of the general student population. For example, in 1993, 42% of high school seniors took the test; 58% of high school seniors did not. The SAT is useless for evaluating changes in academic performance; and any educator, journalist, or politician who uses SAT results as an index of changes in achievement does so in ignorance or for reasons that must be considered suspect. In spite of this fact, the media and the last four Secretaries of Education have used SAT scores in this manner, thus perpetuating and increasing the public's misunderstanding of American students' literacy, numeracy, and general knowledge.

Although the SAT is not appropriate for evaluating changes in reading over time, there exist three primary data sources for comparing past and present reading: 1) then-and-now studies, 2) test restandardizations, and 3) the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

Then-and-Now Studies. The question is, Do students *now* read better than students back *then* — whenever then was? To answer this question, researchers administer an old test once given to students some time in the past to students who are now in school. By comparing the scores from students in that time to the scores of today's students, researchers determine if there has been a change.

Until the National Assessment of Educational Progress began in 1968, no systematic national assessment of changes in academic achievement over time existed. Absent a national effort, a handful of individual researchers conducted small-scale then-and-now studies. Farr, Tuinman, and Rowls (1974) reviewed all such studies up to 1974 and

grouped them into two categories: those that did not use standardized achievement tests and those that did.

The earlier then-and-now studies started with tests administered between 1845 and 1929 (the *then* tests) and compared results when those tests were administered as the *now* tests between 1905 and 1947. None of these tests was standardized. Instead, each had been written by school personnel for regular school purposes, such as course examinations, entrance examinations, and so on. No test was strictly a reading test. Rather, they tested such subject knowledge as geography, astronomy, grammar, history, and philosophy.

An example of an early then-and-now study is summarized by Farr and his colleagues. In 1919 Caldwell and Courtis discovered a musty file of corrected Boston high school entrance examinations administered in 1845 to 530 eighth-grade students from a total of nearly 1,100 eighth-grade students then identified as having high potential for high school performance. That is, the only Boston eighth-graders who took the high school entrance examination were those in school to begin with and who had been selected by their teachers and administrators as having the potential to do well on that test. Caldwell and Courtis administered portions of that 1845 test to 12,000 Boston eighth-graders in 1919. These 12,000 students were not preselected as the best students. The test measured eight school subjects. The average score of the 1845 group was 37.5; the average score of the 1919 group was 45.5, in spite of the fact that the 1845 students were preselected for their academic excellence.

Six studies were classified as the earlier then-and-now studies. The *now* groups outperformed the *then* groups on 14 of the 16 tests administered in these six studies. While none of these 16 tests was a reading test *per se*, it is illogical to believe that such academic gains could be achieved without commensurate gains in reading performance.

Later, beginning in the 1920s, 13 then-and-now studies compared students on standardized achievement tests. An example of one of these later studies was conducted by Miller and Lanton. Between 1952 and

1954, these researchers administered to students in grades three, four, and five in Evanston, Illinois, the same achievement tests that had been administered in the same grades and district in 1932 or 1933. The tests measured reading vocabulary and reading comprehension. The changes from *then* to *now* were stated in grade-equivalent scores. Gains over the 20-year span were three months for grade three, seven months for grade four, and three months for grade five.

These later 13 studies tested a total of 930,000 youngsters from all parts of the country using 46 different tests or subtests. *Now* students outperformed *then* students on more than 80% of these tests. Indeed, the authors of 12 of the 13 studies concluded that the *now* students read better than the *then* students. (The one study that concluded the opposite compared 1918 students to 1938 students on oral reading ability; oral reading was de-emphasized in school curricula after 1930.)

Two states, Iowa and Indiana, also have conducted long-term, then-and-now studies. For example, in Iowa the reading vocabulary and reading comprehension sections of the Iowa Every Pupil Test of Basic Skills were administered in 1940 to 38,000 representative students in grades three through eight. The same tests were administered again in 1965 to 38,000 similar students. Change was measured in months. In the 25 years from 1940 to 1965, scores at each of the six grades increased, from as little as 4.1 months to as much as 12.4 months. The average gain for the six grades was 6.6 months in reading vocabulary and 8.5 months in reading comprehension. Not only was the average score higher, but the scores of the best and poorest (90th and 10th percentile) students also were higher. Similar results were found in the Indiana study.

Test Restandardization Studies. Beginning in the late 1940s and early 1950s, standardized achievement tests became widely used in American schools. After a new test has been written and tested in a number of tryouts, it is published in its final form and administered to a large sample of students representative of the age and grade for which it is intended. A set of norms is derived from the results of this large-

scale testing. Using the data from this norming sample, test publishers calculate the norms tables. School districts then compare the scores of their students to the scores in these norms tables.

The process of periodically updating the norms tables is restandardization. Test publishers sometimes administer an existing test to a new sample of students and calculate new norms from this new sample. When a test has not been changed in any way but simply readministered to a new norming sample, then a simple comparison of the scores of the new to old samples will show any changes over time.

An example of a simple renorming is the Diagnostic Reading Scales (Spache 1981). This is an individually administered test of silent and oral reading, which consists of a series of passages graded by difficulty from preprimer through eighth grade. The difficulty of those passages was determined by norming procedures in 1963. When renormed in 1981, Spache used the same reading passages as in the 1963 edition (except for very minor wording changes) and found at every grade that the difficulty level of the passages had *decreased* — by three to six months in grades one and two and by a full year in grades three through eight. That is, passages appropriate for beginning second-graders in 1963 were too easy for beginning second-graders in 1981, and passages suitable for eighth-graders in 1963 were too easy for eighth-graders in 1981.

Many publishers also change or "upgrade" test items when they revise an existing test. While collecting the norming data, they administer both the revised test and the original test to a representative sample of current students. To determine if there has been a change in reading ability between the times of the first and second norming, they contrast the average or median scores on the old and revised test.

For example, in revising and restandardizing the 1937 Gates Silent Reading Comprehension Test in 1957, Gates (1961) administered the 1937 edition in 1957 to a sample of 31,000 students in grades three through nine. Gates compared the scores of this 1957 sample to the scores on the same test of the original 1937 norming sample of 101,000 similar

students. Each sample was representative of its population at its time. At each of the seven grades, the 1957 students scored approximately five months higher than the 1937 students.

An important and excellent study of changes in scores on achievement tests over time was conducted by Linn, Graue, and Sanders (1990). For the six most widely used achievement tests in America, they calculated "the average yearly change in percentile rank of scores from one test norming to the next in reading and mathematics" (p. 11) since the mid-1970s. For five of the six tests, they found noteworthy increases in scores at each grade between first and ninth grade. For example, on the California Achievement Test (forms C and E), for grades one through six, the scores increased an average 2.15 percentile points per year; and for grades seven through nine, the scores increased an average of 2.0 percentile points per year.

Results of restandardization studies for the Iowa Tests of Educational Development, the Metropolitan Achievement Tests, and the Sequential Tests of Educational Progress produced similar findings. The findings also are corroborated by recent studies comparing 1960s basal readers to 1980s basals. Perry and Sagen (1989) found that 1980s basals have much higher vocabulary loads than earlier basals, and this increased vocabulary difficulty increases reading difficulty. Morris and Johns (1989) found a three-month increase in the readability (difficulty) level of basals in grades one through three from the 1960s to the 1980s.

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). None of the then-and-now or restandardization data supported the hue and cry about declining student literacy that arose across the land in the 1950s and 1960s as exemplified by Flesch's *Why Johnny Can't Read* (1955), Walcutt's *Tomorrow's Illiterates* (1961), or Admiral Rickover's well-publicized harangues about illiterate naval recruits. Indeed, just as these criticisms were reaching a crescendo in the mid-1960s, all the available data indicated that elementary and middle school students were reading better than at any other time in the nation's history. And high

school students were reading as well or better than in the past, although some data indicated a possible slight decline.

This ill-founded criticism and other perceived education ills, such as the failure of new math, led then-U.S. Commissioner of Education Francis Keppel to ask Ralph Tyler in 1963 to identify "procedures by which necessary information might be periodically collected to furnish a basis for public discussion and broader understanding of educational progress." From Tyler's response and a host of conferences and development projects during President Lyndon Johnson's Administration, the first national assessments in science, citizenship, and writing were conducted in 1968. In 1969, the name given to this project was the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Today, NAEP conducts assessments of more than 10 academic areas every two to eight years. The first NAEP reading assessment was in 1971 (Wirtz and Lapointe 1982).

Interestingly, legislation for the collection of "statistics and facts as shall show the condition and progress of education in the several States and Territories" was a part of a law known as the *Department of Education Act*, signed by Johnson in '67 — Andrew Johnson in 1867. U.S. Education Commissioners have made reports to Congress since 1867, but it was a full century before federal education authorities began to assess the academic abilities of American students in any rigorous, sequential, and thorough manner.

The first step for NAEP-Reading in constructing their reading tests was to assess the readability of texts — that is, scaling the difficulty of texts — from those used by beginning readers to those used by world-class scholars. Defining readability is part science and part art. The problem is that the difficulty of any text consists of at least two components: 1) the density of the text's vocabulary and sentences and 2) the questions or tasks to which the reader must respond and which require prior knowledge and abstract thinking. For example, the level of difficulty of the nursery rhyme, "Little Jack Horner," which any third-grade reader could read, remains at third-grade difficulty with questions such as "What was Jack eating?" or "Where did Jack sit?"

But ask, "To what king was the pie to be delivered?" (Henry VIII) or "What was the 'plum' pulled out of the pie?" (a deed to an English manorial estate), and the difficulty of this poem is significantly altered.

NAEP-Reading has moved away from the age or grade levels typically used to scale reading ability by using item-response theory to measure proficiency on a scale of 0 to 500, although so few students perform at the extremes that the scale is restricted to 150 to 350. This 150-350 scale is divided into five ranges, each given a label and brief description:

- 150 or *rudimentary*: comprehend simple, discrete reading tasks;
- 200 or *basic*: identify facts in simple texts, combine ideas, and make inferences;
- 250 or *intermediate*: interrelate ideas and make generalizations;
- 300 or *adept*: understand complicated information; and
- 350 or *advanced*: learn from specialized reading materials.

NAEP-Reading has been administered to 9-, 13-, and 17-year-old students in seven national assessments: 1971, 1975, 1980, 1984, 1988, 1990, and 1992. The sampling design is rigorous and representative of the total U.S. population in terms of region, size and type of community, gender, race, and ethnicity.

Although there are increases in the scores from 1971 to 1992 for each age group, only for 13- and 17-year-olds are the differences statistically significant. Both 13- and 17-year-olds scored higher in 1992 than in 1971. None of the changes is educationally significant.

Comparing the reading proficiencies of in-school 17-year-olds in 1986 to 21- to 25-year-old adults in a secondary NAEP study yielded one important similarity and one important difference. The groups are similar in that only a small fraction of the 17-year-olds (1.4%) and the young adults (3.2%) scored at the *basic* level or lower. (Indeed, only 6% of young adults scored below the average score for fourth-graders, and most of these low scorers were not native English speakers.)

In fact, there is very little illiteracy among the young adult population in the United States. There are 250% more illiterates among those

over age 55 than there are among those under age 25 (Kirsch, Jungeblut, Jenkins, and Kolstad 1993).

The important difference between 17-year-olds and young adults was that 4.9% of 17-year-olds scored at the *advanced* level and 20.9% of young adults scored at this highest level. This means that between age 17 and the early 20s, "there is a striking increase" in the percentage achieving at the highest level of reading comprehension (Kirsch and Jungeblut 1987, pp. 39-40). The authors of this study speculate that this difference "probably reflects a combination of continued participation in formal education and participation in society" (p. 40).

NAEP also reports reading trends by race and ethnicity, gender, region of the country, size and type of community, parents' educational level, and type of schools (public and private). African-American students made nearly continual increases in reading performance from 1971 to 1990, and their 1990 scores are significantly higher than the 1971 scores for all ages. The 1975 to 1990 scores of Hispanic students (NAEP did not begin tabulating results for Hispanic students until 1975) show similar increases.

For students in grades one through eight, data from then-and-now studies and test restandardization studies point to the conclusion that there was a continuous increase in reading ability into the 1960s. Since the mid-1960s, the data are slightly mixed; all restandardization studies find a continuing increase for grades one through eight, but NAEP-Reading assessments from 1970 to 1992 indicate increases only for 13-year-olds (seventh- and eighth-graders), while scores for nine-year-olds (third- and fourth-graders) remained constant. For high-schoolers, all then-and-now studies and the vast majority of test restandardization studies find significant increases in reading throughout the 20th century, findings confirmed by statistically significant increases from 1971 to 1992 for 17-year-olds on the NAEP-Reading assessments. One thing is sure: Unqualified statements proclaiming that today's students are less literate than past students are flat-out wrong.

Real Issues in Reading Instruction

If students today read better than their counterparts of yesterday, do they read as well as they should? The lesson of historical analyses is that the demands for literacy continually increase. If the question were as simple as being literate or illiterate, then there would be no issue. Only 2% of 1990 17-year-olds scored in NAEP's two lowest literacy levels. "It is clear from these data that 'illiteracy' is not a major problem for this population," and that, "the overwhelming majority of America's young adults are able to use printed information to accomplish many tasks that are either routine or uncomplicated" (Kirsch and Jungeblut 1987, pp. 5-6).

However, Kirsch and Jungeblut argue that a real problem is that only 54% of young adults and 39% of 17-year-olds can be identified as *adept* or *advanced* readers:

> It is distressing, however, that relatively small proportions of young adults are estimated to be proficient at levels characterized by the more moderate or relatively complex tasks. It has been argued that many, if not most, of society's management, professional, and technical service-sector jobs will require participation in some postsecondary program. This argument raises the question of whether or not individuals with more limited literacy skills will qualify for or benefit from such education and training programs. (p. 6)

A reading expert, an historian, and an economist, respectively, Venezky, Kaestle, and Sum (1987) were asked by NAEP to reflect on

the findings of both the young adult and 1984 NAEP reading data and to "draft a document that would spell out the implications of" the assessments (p. 1). One of the major issues addressed by these authors was the level of proficiency of current (1984) young adults and 17-year-olds as juxtaposed to their analyses of the expected levels of literacy required for future employment.

These authors argued that everyday reading tasks will require processing of complex information derived from multiple sources of printed information, such as more sophisticated analysis and synthesis of texts, commonly known as critical reading/thinking. They warned that "we must not assume that critical reading/thinking skills are reserved for older children or children in advanced classes" (p. 45).

Among the conclusions that can be drawn from this work are two specific recommendations for reading instruction:

1. Literacy instruction at all levels should move beyond teaching students to find main ideas and details in texts to the higher-level skills of applying "logic, inference, and synthesis" to texts.
2. There should be greater use of multiple texts in reading instruction. In particular, the studied texts should be not only narrative, but also expository, such as history, science, math, and so on.

Not everyone subscribes to this view of an ever-increasing need for highly literate workers to fill future employment needs. The National Center on Education and the Economy's Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce issued its report, *America's Choice: High Skills or Low Wages!* (1990), after "visiting hundreds of American firms in all sectors of the economy and interviewing thousands of employers, personnel managers, production supervisors and workers" (p. 23).

This survey found that "although a few managers are worried about literacy and basic math skills, education levels rarely seem a concern." The report states that "despite the widespread presumption that advancing technology and the evolving economy will create jobs demanding higher skills, only five percent of employers . . . feel that education and

skill requirements are increasing significantly" (p. 25). "The primary concern of more than 80% of the employers is finding workers with a good work ethic and appropriate social behavior, 'reliable,' 'a good attitude,' 'a pleasant appearance,' 'a good personality'."

Indeed, employers today often claim to see "basic skills" as a work ethic and social skills. They sometimes do not include what educators consider to be the basic skills: literacy or numeracy (U.S. Congress, Office of Technology Assessment 1990, p. 165). But whether employers envision a major literacy problem in the future or not, there is solid historical precedence for increasing literacy requirements (Resnick and Resnick 1977; Stedman and Kaestle 1987).

American schools have done an outstanding job of creating a literate society. At the turn of the century, high school completion rates were less than 5% and illiteracy was the norm, even for second-generation Americans. Today, high school completion rates hover at 80%, and less than 4% of young adults cannot read. However, the progress in reading skill attainment for secondary students has not been as great as the progress made by elementary and middle school students. Because many education observers predict that reading for work and college in the 21st century will demand high-level reading ability, it seems reasonable to set higher literacy expectations for secondary students.

Higher expectations mean: 1) teachers providing more reading instruction; 2) students, especially average or better readers, engaged in more difficult texts; 3) more critical analysis and synthesis of information and ideas from multiple texts; and 4) teachers placing more emphasis on meaningful vocabulary throughout the grades.

More Reading Instruction. Middle and secondary teachers of science and social studies must teach their students the critical analysis and synthesis skills needed to learn from their content texts. Teachers of such subjects cannot assume that a student who can comprehend fiction can learn independently from expository textbooks. For example, English teachers assigning *A Tale of Two Cities* will teach critical reading skills for novels by directing their students to information on

the time and setting of the novel, by preteaching difficult vocabulary, by directing students to the motivations and interactions of the characters, and so on. Similarly, science teachers must teach their students how to retrieve, organize, analyze, and synthesize the information in their expository textbooks. Some subject specialists resist this, arguing that they are not teachers of reading. The answer to this argument is, How are you able to teach your students your discipline if you fail to teach them to understand the literature of your discipline?

More Difficult Texts. Texts with low readability levels generally make it easier for students to learn content, but they do little to develop the students' reading ability (Carver and Liebert 1995). On the other hand, texts with higher readabilities may stretch students' reading ability, but may make learning content more difficult. The question is, What is the purpose of the textbook — to stretch students' reading abilities or to provide students with easily accessible content information?

Because textbooks include reader helps such as guides and glossaries and because teachers usually are available to help students who experience reading difficulty, it seems reasonable that textbooks should be somewhat challenging for most students. This position seems particularly defensible for students with average or better reading ability, although for students having reading difficulties, suitable alternative texts that are easier to read should be used. It can be concluded from the research that the number of advanced readers quadruples from age 17 to the early 20s, most likely because of the increased reading difficulty of college and vocational texts. Students who are challenged by more difficult texts earlier can make these kinds of gains when they are 15 and 16 years old.

More Analysis and Synthesis from Multiple Sources. At least 50 years of research support the conclusion that teachers and textbooks too often concentrate on asking students for simple responses to unimportant questions. To be sure, teachers need to know if students comprehend the details of a text; but students need to be able to go beyond

simple comprehension. They need to be able to draw inferences and evaluate information. They need to be able to condense or synthesize the information.

Knowledge increasingly will be disseminated in multiple formats: written texts, electronic media, computers, and so on. To acquire information from this array of formats, students must be taught to apply critical thinking abilities to multiple texts. For example, a fifth-grade teacher used multiple texts to help students examine the issue of an oil spill. The teacher showed the students the CBS television show, "60 Minutes," in which the Alaskan oil spill from the *Exxon Valdez* was discussed. The teacher also showed the Exxon Oil Company's educational film depicting the company as having satisfactorily cleaned up the oil spill and provided students several magazine and newspaper articles and editorials that portrayed different views of Exxon's clean-up. This kind of critical analysis activity must occur frequently in today's classroom if tomorrow's readers are to be able to meet tomorrow's reading demands.

More Emphasis on Meaningful Vocabulary. The essence of all instruction is helping students learn new *things* and the words that signify those things. *Things* are objects, ideas, feelings, and actions, which includes everything in the universe.

Learning things and words serves four major educational goals. First, learning words and things requires youngsters to make continually finer distinctions among objects, ideas, feelings, and actions, which brings about a change in the learner's conceptualization of the world. Second, learning new things and words requires students to associate, integrate, or differentiate the new things from the things they already know. Linus Pauling, twice awarded the Nobel Prize for chemistry, captured this necessity to organize knowledge when he told an interviewer:

> If I couldn't find a place for some thing, then I would change my picture of the world until I understood where it fit. Or, I would throw it out and come back to it later.

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Third, learning new things and words facilitates reading comprehension. When students do not know the meanings of words used in a text, comprehension of that text is diminished. Research by Patrick J. Finn (1977-78) found that the words that convey the most information in a text are the very words that are most difficult to learn from the surrounding context. Hirsch (1987) recently popularized the term *cultural literacy* to describe things common to American culture. He argues that prior knowledge of such things — cultural literacy — is necessary for reading comprehension.

Fourth, learning things and words facilitates students' abilities to use words appropriately. Our society places great value on the masterful use of words and ridicules the slovenly or inaccurate use of words.

Teachers should emphasize the acquisition of meaningful vocabulary throughout the grades. To do this, they should promote students' natural curiosity about words and make learning words a fun and natural experience. Unfortunately, the most common method for teaching vocabulary — looking up long lists of words in a dictionary, writing their meanings, and using them in sentences — is at cross-purposes with the goal of promoting a natural curiosity about words. Students not only should be exposed to difficult words, they also should be involved in such word activities as puns, malaprops, great orations, spoonerisms, oxymorons, and other interesting activities. The child has a natural inclination to learn words and things. Schools must enhance that natural inclination.

Conclusion

Too many educators and parents believe the myth of declining student literacy. The reality is that today's students are good readers. And educators need to get that point across to a disbelieving public.

Here's a suggestion that I give my students in a doctoral-level seminar on reading assessment:

Prepare a 3x5 card with the following outline.

A. The improper uses of SAT scores.
B. Then-and-now studies of reading attainment.
C. Restandardization studies.
D. NAEP reading assessment conclusions.

The next time you are standing around at a garden party or a wedding reception and someone laments the decline of student literacy, pull out this card and set the matter straight.

I warn my students that most people will not believe them. But just imagine if all responsible educators had a 3x5 card in their wallet or purse and used it. Perhaps we finally could rid ourselves of the myth that American kids can't read. And then we might begin to address truly important reading issues.

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